

# We've been given hope...

## Christmas worship material and background information

### Bible readings

Isaiah 9:1-7;  
John 1:1-14

### 1.

#### All-age talk: Building a future

Jesus is our hope. He came to build us a better future. Jesus is God and King of Kings, but he came to earth and was born in a stable, making himself small and human to show us that his love for us is bigger than we can possibly imagine. Jesus came to show us he is on our side.

- ★ Jesus is sometimes called the Light of the World. When all around us seems dark and difficult, he lights our way – a bit like a lighthouse shining through the darkness, guiding boats safely home.
- ★ God has given us hope, and he asks us to share our hope with others, building a better future for all around us.
- ★ *Ask the congregation to list some of the things humans can build (eg, houses, boats and bridges, towns and cities, as well as relationships, trust, community).*
- ★ It would be difficult to build any of these things alone. But if we hold onto our hope and join together, we can build almost anything.
- ★ *Ask for 11 volunteers (adults and children). Produce a bucket or box of old recycling material, including boxes, cardboard tubes and bottles, plus sellotape and scissors. Ask one person to stand on one side of you and ten on the other.*
- ★ *Tell the individual and the team to imagine they must*

*build a lighthouse on a cliff on the edge of the sea. (You may need to explain what a lighthouse is, for the benefit of the youngest members of the congregation.) They must build the biggest tower possible to make sure people out at sea can see the light. Give them five minutes. Then stick a star on the top of each to symbolise the light. You might want to warn the person working alone beforehand that their tower should be smaller!*

- ★ Even if we think what we can offer is quite ordinary, we often find we can do good things for ourselves and those around us. And when we work together, sharing our hope and encouraging one another, we can build amazing things – things we can see like buildings or boats, and things we can't see so well, like confidence and friendship.
- ★ The things that we build can benefit even more people too, like a lighthouse, helping others to find their way to a brighter future when things are stormy and troubled.

- ★ Nuryiani, Husana and Yusnita, known in their village in Indonesia as 'the three mothers', lost their homes when a huge wave called a tsunami washed them away at Christmas four years ago. To make things worse, the local government would not let them begin the long, hard job of rebuilding their village because they thought it was unsafe to do so by the sea.
- ★ But the three mothers loved their homes, and their families had always fished for a living. They could not give up hope. Christian Aid designed some new houses that were better able to stand in floods and storms, and *every day for a year* the mothers went to see the government official to ask him to change his mind. Finally he did.
- ★ 'My heart was as big as a mountain when I heard the news,' says Nuryiani. With some help from Christian Aid, their whole village has now been rebuilt – with houses that are better and stronger than before. 'Now I hope for a better life,' says Yusnita.

## 2. Sermon notes: Kingdom of hope

### Fresh hope

- ★ Christmas is about opposites. God incarnate, a light in the darkness, bringing hope in the face of despair, and justice to the exploited.
- ★ In his time, Jesus smashed hopes, too. He disappointed all who waited for a traditional king – those who thought they had been promised a man of wealth and splendour, a man of power who would take control.
- ★ The word became flesh and walked among us. But Mighty God was also a Prince of Peace. He was not set apart, but was a loving, everlasting father (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:12). In an act of love never seen before or since, he gave himself up for us. The King of Kings, worthy of all glory (1 John 1:14), humbled himself and became a servant among the servants and slaves of this world – the poor and the oppressed. (Isaiah 61: 1-2, Luke 4:18-19)

- ★ As he did so, Jesus shattered all hope of worldly kingdoms, and offered instead a lasting hope. In places where worldly kingdom values of power and wealth are pursued at heavy cost to the weakest in society, the King is rudely ignored (John 1:10-11). But Jesus promises a kingdom in which much is sacrificed, but everything is gained – in which the most vulnerable are raised up and justice reigns (Isaiah 9:7).

### King of light

- ★ 'The land of the shadow of death' (Isaiah 9:2) is a daily reality for so many in God's world. Speaking of losing her son to the tsunami in 2004, Yusnita described her life as 'gloomy'. She said she felt like 'a paralysed person'. But God's kingdom of love and peace offers hope of release. 'There will be no more gloom for those who were in distress' (Isaiah 9:1).
- ★ Jesus is the light of life. (John 1:4), and where God's kingdom is upheld, there should be no half-lived lives. Yusnita is still struggling to come to terms with her loss, but counselling from Christian Aid partner Yakkum

Emergency Unit (YEU) has given her hope. 'They helped me to wake up each morning and get on with life,' she says.

- ★ And the 'light that gives light to every man' (John 1:9) can also be *in us*. 'You are the light of the world,' says Jesus. (Matthew 5:14). It helps us to see God's kingdom, both in the future and today – it helps us recognise him as King, and to see His glory (John 1:10 and 14). It shows us how to be a part of God's kingdom.
- ★ Jesus came to reconcile us to himself, and he also came to reconcile us to each other, to rebuild broken relationships and bring families back together.
- ★ £65 could buy the materials needed for storm-resistant roofing for a building in India, helping to prevent future disasters. We've been given hope – and we must pass hope on.



The three mothers stand together in the doorway of a newly built house

### 3. Prayer points

- ★ Thank God for Christmas and the promise of a better future that Jesus brought us.
- ★ Thank God for the gifts that are heaped upon us at Christmas; for love and hope, family and friends and for the gifts under the tree.
- ★ Pray for those whose hope is running short this Christmas; for those who are poor and for those suffering the impact of disasters.
- ★ Pray for all who share their hope with others this Christmas, helping to build a better future for those around them.

### 4. Ideas for using the prayer box

As a symbol of God's gift of hope this Christmas, we've produced a prayer box for each member of the congregation, as a lasting reminder of God's promises. Give each person a prayer box and a ribbon or piece of string, and read aloud together the prayer on the inside. You could also extend the reflection in one or two of the following ways:

- ★ You could encourage each person to write their own prayer of hope for those who suffer as a result of disasters around the world – on the blank spaces on the inside of the box.
- ★ If you have a Christmas tree in your church, ask each person to close up their prayer box, thread the ribbon or string through the holes and tie the ends, and then come forward to hang it on the tree. Once each person has come forward, turn on the lights on the tree.



- ★ Or you could ask everyone to take their prayer box home and hang it on their own tree. Suggest they place a small personal item inside the box, representing their hopes and dreams for themselves, for others, for the world (eg, a photo or drawing or some thoughts written on a piece of paper). On Christmas Day, each person should take their box and give it to someone else, as a symbol that the gift of hope is strengthened and multiplied when we share it with others.

### 5. A prayer of hope

**Everlasting Father,  
thank you for your gift of hope;  
the indescribable gift of your Son.**

**Wonderful Counsellor,  
shine your light again this Christmas.  
Teach us to champion peace and justice.**

**Prince of Peace,  
help us to build your kingdom,  
for the sake of the poor, the weak and the broken.**

**Amen.**

## 6. Christian Aid's response to the tsunami

On 26 December 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami robbed hundreds of thousands of people of their lives, while 1.5 million people lost their livelihood and millions more were displaced. The response from those who watched the disaster unfold in the media was unprecedented: eight out of ten people in the UK donated to the appeal.

It was hard to believe that those hit hardest might ever return to normal life. But almost four years on, Christian Aid alone has already spent £40 million across India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and has helped half a million people do just that. By the end of 2009, we plan to spend every penny of the total £47 million donated. So where has the money been spent?

- ★ We have built almost 21,000 permanent homes, repairing and rebuilding the supporting infrastructure, and resettling 120,000 people in structures that are stronger and more

disaster-resilient. This is the equivalent of building a city the size of Chelmsford.

- ★ We have helped 130,000 children back into school – with books, uniforms, bags and after-school clubs.
- ★ 200,000 people have received skills training and interest-free loans, so that they can earn a living once more; and 4,000 boats have helped fishermen return to the seas.
- ★ Trauma counselling has supported 90,000 people through the grief of losing loved ones.
- ★ 72,000 people have been involved in our HIV-awareness work – a priority as emergencies increase vulnerability to HIV (through increased migration of labourers and families, new relationships formed and women forced to earn a living through sex work).

An independent evaluation of our work following the tsunami found that 'unusually for an evaluation exercise of this breadth, the results are strongly positive'. The team found that working through local partners allowed 'for

a more locally relevant response, but also greatly facilitated the transition process from relief to recovery, and wider social development'. This supports our belief that local people know best what they need, and can direct funds much more effectively.

## 7. Christian Aid and disaster prevention

In the last 15 years, while three times as many disasters happened in developing countries as in developed countries, the number of people killed in developing countries was more than ten times higher.

This doesn't have to be the case. As climate change increases the risk of natural disasters, Christian Aid's partners across the developing world are making disaster prevention and preparedness a priority – and it's saving lives. Their work falls broadly into three areas:

- ★ **Building work.** Construction that takes place in disaster-prone areas must be disaster-resistant. Necessary features

are usually inexpensive and, with proper training, can be incorporated, using local construction materials and techniques. Where disasters have struck and reconstruction efforts are underway, this work is crucial.

- ★ **Preventing damage caused by non-structural hazards.** When disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and cyclones hit poor communities, most injuries are not caused by building collapse, but by falling, floating or flying objects. Early-warning alarm systems, strategically placed fire-fighting equipment, and securing falling hazards can prevent injury and loss of life.
- ★ **Strengthening communities at risk.** A well-established, informed and trained community is the greatest disaster-prevention tool available. Empowering poor people themselves to respond to emergency situations means that when disaster strikes, a fully trained team is already there.

Our partners are already doing some amazing work, but much more needs to be done.

- ★ **£7** could buy a three-month supply of beans for a family following a disaster in Burma.
- ★ **£19** could provide 200 trees to produce fruit and help prevent soil erosion in Ethiopia.
- ★ **£65** could buy the materials needed for storm-resistant roofing for a building in India.
- ★ **£141** could buy three airtight granaries to store food and feed families, following drought or storms in Honduras.
- ★ **£330** could pay for a radio transmitter to warn a community in Guatemala of life-threatening floods.

## 8. The work of YEU in Kuala Bubon

YEU shows Christian Aid's disaster-response-and-prevention work in action. Following the tsunami, YEU stood by the community in Kuala Bubon in Indonesia, guiding them back to normality:

★ After conducting a feasibility study on the Kuala Bubon location, YEU formulated a plan for reconstruction, together with the community and experts from Indonesian universities. The partner designed flood- and earthquake-resistant houses built on reinforced concrete stilts so that families could safely return to their land.

★ YEU supported the community as they petitioned the local government officials to let them build this new safe housing on their original land.

★ Once the campaign had been won, YEU built temporary shelters for the villagers, while construction of permanent housing was underway. Other public facilities, such as a fish market and docks, were also built to support the economic activity of the village.

★ YEU supported the community as they came to terms with the loss of loved ones, offering formal counselling and day-to-day support. In Kuala Bubon, 221 of the 790 villagers lost their lives.

## 9. Christian Aid in Indonesia

Christian Aid did not have a country programme in Indonesia before the tsunami. While in India and Sri Lanka our response was rolled out through existing partnerships with local organisations, in Indonesia new relationships and ways of working had to be urgently established.

We funded three partners, including YEU, through Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, and established a direct relationship with a fourth partner to work on child-protection issues. We also worked with the UK-based international agency Habitat for Humanity.

The work of YEU and other partners will draw to an end as the tsunami-reconstruction programme works towards completion by the end of 2009. But our partners will continue disaster-mitigation-and-prevention work across Asia.



The busy fish market in Kuala Bubon

**The villagers of Kuala Bubon set foot in their permanent houses in January 2008 – and today Kuala Bubon is a bustling fishing community once more, full of hope for the future.**